VII

PLATO TO THE FRIENDS AND FOLLOWERS OF DION, WELFARE.

You have written me that I must consider your aims as identical with those that Dion had, and you therefore urge me to co-operate with you
324 as much as I can, both in word and in deed. My answer is that if your views and purposes are really the same as his, I agree to join with you; if not, I shall have to consider the matter further. What his principles and ambitions were I can tell you, I may say, not from conjecture, but from certain knowledge. For when I first came to Syracuse, being then about forty years of age, Dion was of the age that Hipparinus is now; and it was
b then that he came to the opinions which he continued to hold until the end; the Syracusans, he thought, ought to be free and live under the best of laws. It would not then be surprising if some divine power should bring Hipparinus also to the same mind that Dion had about government. To

learn the way in which these convictions come about is instructive to young and old alike; and since the present occasion seems appropriate, I will try to describe how they originated in my own case.

When I was a young man I had the same ambition as many others: I thought of entering public life as soon as I came of age. And certain happenings in public affairs favored me, as follows. The constitution we c
then had, being anathema to many, was overthrown; and a new government was set up consisting of fifty-one men, two groups—one of eleven and another of ten—to police the market place and perform other necessary duties in the city and the Piraeus respectively, and above them thirty other d
officers with absolute powers. Some of these men happened to be relatives and acquaintances of mine, and they invited me to join them at once in what seemed to be a proper undertaking. My attitude toward them is not surprising, because I was young. I thought that they were going to lead the city out of the unjust life she had been living and establish her in the path of justice, so that I watched them eagerly to see what they would do. But as I watched them they showed in a short time that the preceding constitution had been a precious thing. Among their other deeds they e
named Socrates, an older friend of mine whom I should not hesitate to call the justest man of that time, as one of a group sent to arrest a certain citizen[1] who was to be put to death illegally, planning thereby to make 325
Socrates willy-nilly a party to their actions. But he refused, risking the utmost danger rather than be an associate in their impious deeds. When I saw all this and other like things of no little consequence, I was appalled and drew back from that reign of injustice.[2] Not long afterwards the rule of the Thirty was overthrown and with it the entire constitution; and once more I felt the desire, though this time less strongly, to take part in public b
and political affairs. Now many deplorable things occurred during those troubled days, and it is not surprising that under cover of the revolution too many old enmities were avenged; but in general those who returned from exile[3] acted with great restraint. By some chance, however, certain powerful persons brought into court this same friend Socrates, preferring against him a most shameless accusation, and one which he, of all men, c
least deserved. For the prosecutors charged him with impiety, and the jury condemned and put to death the very man who, at the time when his accusers were themselves in misfortune and exile, had refused to have a part in the unjust arrest of one of their friends.

The more I reflected upon what was happening, upon what kind of men were active in politics, and upon the state of our laws and customs, and the older I grew, the more I realized how difficult it is to manage a city's affairs rightly. For I saw it was impossible to do anything without friends d

1. Leon of Salamis. See *Apology* 32c–d.
2. Alternatively, "from those evil men."
3. Supporters of the democracy.

and loyal followers; and to find such men ready to hand would be a piece of sheer good luck, since our city was no longer guided by the customs and practices of our fathers, while to train up new ones was anything but easy. And the corruption of our written laws and our customs was
e proceeding at such amazing speed that whereas at first I had been full of zeal for public life, when I noted these changes and saw how unstable everything was, I became in the end quite dizzy; and though I did not cease to reflect how an improvement could be brought about in our laws
326 and in the whole constitution, yet I refrained from action, waiting for the proper time. At last I came to the conclusion that all existing states are badly governed and the condition of their laws practically incurable, without some miraculous remedy and the assistance of fortune; and I was forced to say, in praise of true philosophy, that from her height alone was it possible to discern what the nature of justice is, either in the state or in
b the individual, and that the ills of the human race would never end until either those who are sincerely and truly lovers of wisdom come into political power, or the rulers of our cities, by the grace of God, learn true philosophy.

Such was the conviction I had when I arrived in Italy and Sicily for the first time. When I arrived and saw what they call there the "happy life"—a life filled with Italian and Syracusan banquets, with men gorging themselves twice a day and never sleeping alone at night, and following all the
c other customs that go with this way of living—I was profoundly displeased. For no man under heaven who has cultivated such practices from his youth could possibly grow up to be wise—so miraculous a temper is against nature—or become temperate, or indeed acquire any other part of virtue. Nor could any city enjoy tranquillity, no matter how good its laws,
d when its men think they must spend their all on excesses, and be easygoing about everything except the feasts and the drinking bouts and the pleasures of love that they pursue with professional zeal. These cities are always changing into tyrannies, or oligarchies, or democracies, while the rulers in them will not even hear mention of a just and equitable constitution.

These, plus the conviction previously mentioned, were my thoughts on
e coming to Syracuse—a coming which may have been mere coincidence, but which seems to have been the work of some higher power laying then the foundation for what has since come to pass with respect to Dion and Syracuse; and for still further misfortunes, too, I fear, unless you now obey
327 the advice which I am giving for the second time. How can I say that my coming to Sicily then was the beginning of it all? In my association with Dion, who was then a young man, I imparted to him my ideas of what was best for men and urged him to put them into practice; and in doing so I was in a way contriving, though quite unwittingly, the destruction of the tyranny that later came to pass. For Dion was in all things quick to learn, especially in the matters upon which I talked with him; and he listened with a zeal and attentiveness I had never encountered in any
b young man, and he resolved to spend the rest of his life differently from

most Italians and Sicilians, since he had come to love virtue more than pleasure and luxury. For this reason his way of life was more than annoying to those who guided themselves by the practices of tyranny, until the death of Dionysius. After that event he conceived that these convictions which he himself had got from proper instruction might arise in others besides c
himself; and observing that they were in fact making their appearance in the minds of some, at least, of his associates, he thought that by the help of the gods Dionysius himself might be counted among this number; and if this should happen, it would mean an incalculably blessed life for the tyrant himself and the other Syracusans. Furthermore, he thought that by all means I should come to Syracuse as soon as possible and become a partner in his plans, for he recalled our conversations together and how d
effectively they had aroused in him the desire for a life of nobility and virtue. If now he could arouse this desire in Dionysius, as he was attempting to do, he had high hopes of establishing throughout the land a true and happy life, without the massacres and deaths and the other evils that have come to pass. With this just purpose in mind Dion persuaded Dionysius to send for me, and he himself wrote urging me by all means to come at e
once before certain others came in contact with Dionysius and diverted him to a less worthy ideal of life. His petition, though too long to give in full, was as follows: "What better opportunity can we expect," he said, "than the situation which Providence has presented us with?" He mentioned the empire in Italy and Sicily, his own power in it, the youth of 328
Dionysius, and the eager interest he was showing in philosophy and culture; Dion's nephews and other relatives, he said, could be easily persuaded to accept the life and doctrine that I have always taught, and would be a very strong additional influence upon Dionysius; so that now, if ever, might we confidently hope to accomplish that union, in the same persons, of philosophers and rulers of great cities.

These and many other like arguments he addressed to me. For my own b
part I felt a certain anxiety, since one never knows how young men will turn out, for their desires arise quickly and often change to their contraries; but Dion's character, I knew, was steadfast by nature and he had already reached middle age. Consequently I weighed the question and was uncertain whether or not to yield to his urging and undertake the journey. What tipped the scales eventually was the thought that if anyone ever was to attempt to realize these principles of law and government, now was the c
time to try, since it was only necessary to win over a single man and I should have accomplished all the good I dreamed of. This, then, was the "bold" purpose I had in setting forth from home, and not what some persons ascribed to me. Above all I was ashamed lest I appear to myself as a pure theorist, unwilling to touch any practical task—and I saw that I was in danger of betraying Dion's hospitality and friendship at a time d
of no little real danger to him. Suppose he should be killed or banished by Dionysius and his other enemies and should come to me in his exile and say, "Here I am, Plato, a fugitive, not because I lacked hoplites or

horsemen to ward off my enemies, but only for need of the persuasive words by which, as I well know, you are always able to turn young men towards goodness and justice and make them friends and comrades of
e one another. This weakness which you could have remedied is the cause of my being here in exile from Syracuse. But my own misfortune is a small part of your dishonor. You are always praising philosophy, and saying she is held in little esteem by the rest of mankind; but in betraying me now have you not, by neglecting this opportunity, also betrayed her? If
329 we had happened to be living in Megara you would certainly have come as a helper in answer to my call, or you would consider yourself the most trifling of men. And now do you think you can escape the charge of cowardice by pleading the length of the journey, the greatness of the voyage and its fatigue? Far from it." To words of this sort what respectable answer could I give? None. And so from motives as rational and just as
b is humanly possible I departed, giving up for those reasons my occupations here, which are not without dignity, to live under a tyranny seemingly unsuited both to my doctrines and to me. In so going I discharged my obligation to Zeus Xenios[4] and cleared myself of reproach from philosophy, which would have been dishonored if I had incurred disgrace through softness or cowardice.

When I arrived—to make the story short—I found the court of Dionysius full of faction and of malicious reports to the tyrant about Dion. I defended
c him as well as I could, but I was able to do very little; and about the fourth month Dionysius, charging Dion with plotting against the tyranny, had him put aboard a small vessel and exiled in disgrace. Thereupon we friends of Dion were all afraid that one of us might be accused and punished as an accomplice in Dion's conspiracy. About me there even went abroad in Syracuse a report that I had been put to death by Dionysius as the cause
d of all that had happened. But Dionysius, seeing how we all felt, and apprehensive lest our fears might lead to something even graver, treated us all kindly, and me especially he reassured, telling me to have no fear and earnestly begging me to remain; for there was no honor for him in my leaving, he said, but only in my remaining. For this reason he made a great pretense of begging me, but we know that the requests of tyrants are mingled with compulsion. He devised a means for preventing my
e departure by bringing me inside the citadel and lodging me there, whence no ship's captain would have dared to take me away without a messenger sent from Dionysius himself commanding him to do so, still less if Dionysius had forbidden it. Nor would any merchant or guard along the roads leading out of the country have let me pass alone, but would have taken me in charge at once and brought me back to Dionysius, especially since
330 another report had already got abroad, contrary to the earlier one, that Dionysius was wonderfully fond of Plato. What in fact was the situation? With the passage of time Dionysius, I must truly say, did become more

4. Zeus the protector of strangers, the guardian of the obligations of hospitality.

and more attached to me as he became more familiar with my manner and character; but he wanted me to praise him more than I did Dion and value his friendship more highly, and he was marvelously persistent towards this end. How this could best have come about, if at all, was through his becoming my disciple and associating with me in discourse b about philosophy; but he shrank from this, for the intriguers had made him fear that he would be entrapped, so that Dion would have accomplished his purposes. I put up with all this, however, holding fast to the original purpose for which I had come, hoping that he might somehow come to desire the philosophic life; but I never overcame his resistance.

These, then, were the circumstances that account for my first visit to Sicily and occupied the time of my sojourn there. Afterwards I came home, c only to return again at the urgent summons of Dionysius. Why I returned and what I did, with the explanation and justification of my actions, I will go into later for the benefit of those who wonder what my purpose was in going a second time. But in order that these incidental matters may not usurp the chief place in my letter, I will first advise what is to be done in the present circumstances. This, then, is what I have to say.

When one is advising a sick man who is living in a way injurious to his health, must one not first of all tell him to change his way of life and give d him further counsel only if he is willing to obey? If he is not, I think any manly and self-respecting physician would break off counseling such a man, whereas anyone who would put up with him is without spirit or skill. So too with respect to a city: whether it be governed by one man or many, if its constitution is properly ordered and rightly directed, it would be sensible to give advice to its citizens concerning what would be to the e city's advantage. But if it is a people who have wandered completely away from right government and resolutely refuse to come back upon its track and instruct their counselor to leave the constitution strictly alone, threaten- 331 ing him with death if he changes it, and order him instead to serve their interests and desires and show them how they can henceforth satisfy them in the quickest and easiest way—any man, I think, who would accept such a role as adviser is without spirit, and he who refuses is the true man. These are my principles; and whenever anyone consults me on a question of importance in his life, such as the making of money, or the care of his b body or soul, if it appears to me that he follows some plan in his daily life or is willing to listen to reason on the matters he lays before me, I advise him gladly and don't stop with merely discharging my duty. But a man who does not consult me at all, or makes it clear that he will not follow advice that is given him—to such a man I do not take it upon myself to offer counsel; nor would I use constraint upon him, not even if he were my own son. Upon a slave I might force my advice, compelling him to follow it against his will; but to use compulsion upon a father or mother is to me an impious act, unless their judgment has been impaired c by disease. If they are fixed in a way of life that pleases them, though it may not please me, I should not antagonize them by useless admonitions,

nor yet by flattery and complaisance encourage them in the satisfaction of desires that I would die rather than embrace. This is the principle which a wise man must follow in his relations towards his own city. Let him
d warn her, if he thinks her constitution is corrupt and there is a prospect that his words will be listened to and not put him in danger of his life; but let him not use violence upon his fatherland to bring about a change of constitution. If what he thinks is best can only be accomplished by the exile and slaughter of men, let him keep his peace and pray for the welfare of himself and his city.

In this way, then, I venture to advise you, as Dion and I used to advise Dionysius, first of all to make his daily life such as to give him the greatest
e possible mastery over himself and win him loyal friends and followers. In so doing, we said, he might avoid his father's experience when, after taking over many great cities in Sicily that had been laid waste by the barbarians, he was unable at their resettlement to establish loyal governments in them. For he had no comrades to head these governments, neither among foreigners, nor among his own brothers whom he had trained in
332 their youth (since they were younger than himself) and raised from private to royal station and from poverty to great wealth. None of these was he able, either by persuasion or by teaching, by benefits conferred or by ties of kinship, to make an associate in his empire. In this respect he was seven times weaker than Darius, who had neither brothers to rely upon, nor persons trained by himself, but only those who helped him to overthrow
b the Mede and the Eunuch. He distributed among them seven provinces, each one greater than all Sicily, and he found them to be loyal, for they did not attack him or one another; and in so doing he set an example of what a good lawgiver and king should be, for he established laws that have kept the Persian empire to this day. We have another example in the Athenians, who took over the protection of a number of Hellenic cities threatened by barbarians. Though the Athenians had not themselves settled these cities but took them over already established, yet they maintained
c their power over them for seventy years because of the friends they made in each of them. But Dionysius, though he united all Sicily into a single city (for he knew that he could trust no one), was scarcely able to survive, for he was poor in friends and loyal followers, and the possession or lack of these is the best indication of a man's virtue or vice.

This is the advice that Dion and I gave to Dionysius, since his father's
d neglect had resulted in his being without culture and unused to associations appropriate to his position. We said that once embarked upon the course just mentioned[5] he should induce others among his relatives and companions to become friends and partners in the pursuit of virtue; but above all to become a friend to himself, for in this respect he was incredibly deficient. We did not say it thus openly, for that would not have been safe, but made veiled references to his weakness, striving by our words to show

5. Accepting the emendation *epi tauta* at d3, with no lacuna in d2.

him that everyone must do this who would save himself and the people over whom he rules, whereas any other course will accomplish his ruin e
and theirs. Let him take the path we pointed out and perfect himself in wisdom and self-control; then if he should resettle the deserted cities of Sicily, and bind them together with such laws and constitutions as would make them friendly to himself and to one another and a mutual help against the barbarians, he would have an empire not twice but actually many times as powerful as his father's had been; he would be ready to 333
inflict upon the Carthaginians a far heavier defeat than they had suffered in the days of Gelon, instead of paying tribute to these barbarians as he was doing at present under the agreement his father had made.

These were the words of exhortation we addressed to Dionysius—we who were conspiring against him, according to the reports that were current on all sides. These reports finally prevailed with Dionysius, as you know, bringing exile to Dion and fear to us his friends. But—to jump to the end b
of the many events of this short time—when Dion returned from the Peloponnesus and Athens he indeed taught Dionysius a lesson. And then when he had delivered the people of Syracuse and twice restored their city to them, they felt towards Dion exactly as Dionysius had. For at the time when Dion was endeavoring to educate Dionysius and form him into a king worthy of the office, making himself thus a partner in all Dionysius' life, Dionysius was giving ear to the slanderers who said that Dion was conspiring against the tyrant in all that he was doing. The studies he c
enjoined were obviously intended, they said, to bewitch the mind of Dionysius so that he would neglect his kingdom and entrust it to Dion, who would then make it his own and treacherously banish Dionysius from power. These suspicions against Dion prevailed then as they did later when circulated among the Syracusans; but their triumph was an unnatural one and puts to shame those who were the cause of it. What sort of triumph it was you ought to hear, you who have asked for my help in the present crisis. I, an Athenian citizen, a friend of Dion and his ally, came to the d
tyrant in order to bring about friendship, not war, between them; but the slanderers worsted me in this contest. And when Dionysius tried by honors and gifts to persuade me to take his side and affirm that his banishment of Dion had been proper, he failed utterly, as you know. Later Dion came home bringing with him two brothers from Athens, friends whom he had e
acquired not through philosophy, but by way of that facile comradeship which is the basis of most friendship, and which is cultivated by hospitality and mystic rites and initiation into secrets; because of these associations and the service they had rendered Dion in returning to Syracuse, these two men who came with him had become his comrades. But when they 334
arrived in Sicily and saw how Dion was being slandered among the people of Syracuse whom he had liberated, and was being accused of plotting to become a tyrant, not only did they betray their comrade and host, but they became as it were his murderers, since they stood by with arms in their hands to assist his assassins. The shame and impiety of their action

I mention only, without dwelling upon it; many others will make it their
b theme both now and in time to come. But I cannot pass over what is said about Athens, that these men brought dishonor on their city. Remember that he also was an Athenian who refused to betray this same Dion when by doing so he could have had money and honors in abundance. He had become Dion's friend not through vulgar fellowship, but through common liberal culture; and this alone should a sensible man trust, rather than kinship of soul or body. Therefore I say that these two who murdered
c Dion were not worthy of bringing their city into discredit, for they were never men of any consequence.

I have said all this for the purpose of advising Dion's friends and relatives; and to all that has been said I add the same advice and the same doctrine that I have given twice before. Do not subject Sicily nor any other state to the despotism of men, but to the rule of laws; this at least is my doctrine. For despotic power benefits neither rulers nor subjects, but is
d an altogether deadly experience for themselves, their children, and their children's children; and no one grasps at the prizes it offers except petty and illiberal souls who know nothing of the divine and human goods that are now and for all time good and just. This is the doctrine that I endeavored to bring home, first to Dion, next to Dionysius, and now for the third time do so to you. Listen to me then, in the name of Zeus the Savior, to whom this third libation belongs. Consider Dionysius and Dion, of whom one
e was deaf to my teachings and now lives ignobly, and the other listened to me and died nobly; for it is altogether noble and right to suffer whatever may come while aiming at the highest for oneself or one's city. None of us can avoid death, nor if any man could would he be happy, as people think; for there is nothing worth mentioning that is either good or bad to
335 creatures without souls, but good and evil exist only for a soul, either joined with a body or separated from it. And we must always firmly believe the sacred and ancient words declaring to us that the soul is immortal, and when it has separated from the body will go before its judges and pay the utmost penalties. Therefore we must count it a lesser evil to suffer great wrongs and injustices than to do them, though this is
b a saying that the avaricious man, who is poor in the goods of the soul, will not give ear to; or if he does, laughs it into silence, as he thinks, and goes about like a wild beast snatching from every quarter whatever he thinks will furnish him meat or drink or the satisfaction of that slavish and graceless pleasure incorrectly called after Aphrodite. He is blind and does not see what defilement his plunderings involve, nor how great an evil attaches to each wicked act—a defilement which the evildoer necessarily drags with him as he goes up and down the earth and follows his
c dishonorable and utterly wretched path to the world below.

Now Dion had accepted this and other similar teachings of mine, and I may rightly be as indignant at his murderers as at Dionysius. Both parties have done infinite wrong to me and, I may say, to all mankind—the first two in striking down a man whose purpose was to realize justice, the

other in refusing to have anything to do with justice, though he possessed every resource for making it prevail throughout his domain. If in his empire d there had been brought about a real union of philosophy and power, it would have been an illustrious example to both Greeks and barbarians, and all mankind would have been convinced of the truth that no city nor individual can be happy except by living in company with wisdom under the guidance of justice, either from personal achievement of these virtues or from a right training and education received under God-fearing rulers. This is the center of my grievance against Dionysius; the other injuries e that he has done to me are trivial in comparison. And he who murdered Dion has unknowingly produced the same result. For of Dion I know, as surely as a man can know anything about his fellow men, that if he had held the power he would not have been diverted from using it for the following purposes. First of all, with regard to Syracuse,[6] his native city, 336 after having cleansed her of her servitude and put on her the garment of freedom, he would have made every effort to adorn her citizens with the best and most suitable laws. Then he would have turned with ardor to the next task, that of resettling all Sicily and liberating her from the barbarians, driving out some of them and subjugating others, a thing he could have done more easily than Hiero. Such deeds accomplished by a man of justice and courage and temperance and philosophy would have produced in the b multitude the same respect for virtue which, if Dionysius had listened to me, would have made its saving appearance, one may say, among all mankind. But now some daemon or avenging deity has fallen upon us, and through disrespect for law and the gods, and worst of all, through the audacity of ignorance—that soil in which all ills are rooted and grow, to produce in the end a bitter fruit for those who have planted them—such ignorance has a second time overturned all our plans and brought them to naught.

But on this our third trial let us avoid saying anything of ill omen. In c spite of previous misfortunes, I advise you, the friends of Dion, to imitate his love for his country and his sober way of living and to try to carry out, under better auspices, these plans of his; and what they were you have clearly heard me explain. If there is anyone in your number who is incapable of living in the Dorian fashion like your fathers and follows the "Sicilian life" of the slayers of Dion, do not ask his help nor imagine that d he will act loyally or dependably. But summon others to help you in resettling all Sicily and equalizing her laws. Summon them not only from Sicily herself, but from the whole of the Peloponnesus; and do not fear even Athens, for Athens also has citizens preeminent in virtue who abhor the shameless audacity of those who slay their hosts. But if these projects I have mentioned must be deferred, because you are now hard pressed by the many and diverse factions daily sprouting in your midst, then e anyone to whom the gods have given a modicum of right opinion must

6. Accepting the emendation *ē epi tode. Surakousas* in a1.

know that there can be no end to the evils of faction until the party that has gained the victory in these battles and in the exiling and slaughtering
337 of fellow citizens forgets its wrongs and ceases trying to wreak vengeance upon its enemies. If it controls itself and enacts laws for the common good, considering its own interests no more than those of the vanquished, the defeated party will be doubly constrained, by respect and by fear, to follow the laws—by fear because the other party has demonstrated its superior force, and by respect because it has shown that it is able and willing to conquer its desires and serve the law instead. In no other way can a city
b that is rent by factions bring its disorders to an end, but it will continue to be divided within itself by strife and enmity, hatred and distrust.

Whenever, then, the victors desire to save their city, they must enter into counsel with themselves and first of all select the most eminent Greeks they can discover—old men, with wives and children at home, descended from a long line of illustrious ancestors and each of them possessing a
c fair amount of property (fifty such men will be enough for a city of ten thousand)—and these they must induce, by personal entreaties and by all the honors at their disposal, to leave home and come to their aid; and when they have come they must direct them to make laws, binding them upon oath to award no more to the victors than to the vanquished, but to consider only the equal and common good of the whole city. And then when the laws have been laid down everything depends upon this. If the
d victors show themselves more eager than the vanquished to obey the laws, then everything will be safe, happiness will abound, and all these evils will take their flight. But let no one who refuses to abide by these principles call upon me or anyone else for support. These proposals are akin to those that Dion and I tried to accomplish for the benefit of Syracuse, but second best. The best were those that we earlier tried to effect with the aid of Dionysius himself [goods to be common to all]. But fortune is mightier
e than men and shattered our plans. Now it is for you to try to bring them about with better luck, and may divine favor attend your efforts.

This, then, is my advice and admonition, and the account of my first visit to Dionysius. As to my later journey across the water, whoever is interested can learn from what follows that it was a reasonable and proper venture. The early part of my first stay in Syracuse passed as I have
338 described it above before giving my advice to the relatives and friends of Dion. After the events described, I made every effort to persuade Dionysius to let me depart, and we came to an agreement that when peace was restored (war was then going on in Sicily) and when Dionysius had made his empire more secure, he would recall both Dion and me. He also asked
b Dion to consider himself not as having been exiled, but only banished.[7] On these conditions I promised that I would return. After peace was restored he sent for me, but Dion he asked to wait another year; me, however, he urged most strongly to come. Dion consented, and even

7. Banishment did not involve the confiscation of the condemned person's property.

entreated me to set sail; in fact there were many reports coming from Sicily that Dionysius had now once more conceived a great desire for philosophy, and this was why Dion persistently urged me not to disobey the summons. But as for me, though I knew that philosophy often affects young men in this way, yet it seemed to me safer, for the present at least, to say farewell c to my plans and let Dion and Dionysius alone; and I offended both of them by replying that I was an old man, and that what they were doing now did not at all accord with the agreement we had made. Now it seems that after this, Archytas visited Dionysius (for before my departure I had established relations of friendship and hospitality between Archytas and his Tarentine friends and Dionysius), and that there were certain other d persons who had learned something from Dion, and others who had learned from them; and being full of these half-understood doctrines, they were apparently trying to converse with Dionysius about them as if he had mastered all my thought. Now he is not without natural capacity for learning, and besides is extraordinarily vain; and no doubt he was pleased to have these questions addressed to him, and ashamed to have it discovered that he had learned nothing during my stay. For these reasons he e came to desire a clearer understanding, and at the same time his ambition spurred him on. (Why he did not learn from me during my first visit, I have described above.) When, therefore, I had got safely home and had, as I have just said, disregarded his summons to return, Dionysius' chief ambition, I think, was to prevent anyone from supposing that I had refused to come to his court because I had a contempt for his nature and character 339 and was displeased with his way of living. I must tell the truth, and put up with it if anyone, after hearing what happened, despises my philosophy and esteems the tyrant's intelligence. Dionysius summoned me a third time, sending a trireme to ease the journey for me, and with it certain Sicilian acquaintances of mine, among them Archedemus, one of the associates of Archytas and a man whom, as he knew, I valued the most highly b of all men in Sicily. These all brought me the same story of the marvelous progress Dionysius was making in philosophy. He knew of my feelings towards Dion and of Dion's desire to have me embark and go to Syracuse; so he wrote me a very lengthy letter, evidently composed with these facts in view. The beginning of it was about as follows: "Dionysius to Plato," then the customary salutations, and immediately afterwards, "If you come c at once to Syracuse as we have requested, first of all the issues that concern Dion will be settled in whatever way you desire (for I know you will desire only what is fair and I agree to this); but if not, none of these questions, whether touching Dion's person or any other matter, will be settled to your liking." Such were his words; to give the rest of the letter would take too much space and would not be pertinent here. Other letters kept coming to me from Archytas and the Tarentines praising Dionysius' d philosophy and saying that if I did not come now the friendship I had brought about between them and Dionysius, a friendship which was of no little importance to their state, would be broken off. Now when the

summons had taken on this character, with my friends in Sicily and Italy pulling me and those at Athens almost pushing me away with their urging,
e the same consideration occurred to me as before, that I ought not to betray my friends and followers in Tarentum. Besides, I thought, it is not an unusual thing that a young man of native intelligence who has overheard some talk of lofty matters should be seized by a love for an ideal of life. I ought then to test the situation clearly to see on which side the truth lay, and by no means to give up in advance and expose myself to the blame
340 that would rightly fall upon me if these reports should really be true. I set off, therefore, under cover of this reasoning, though with many fears and forebodings of evil, as can well be understood. "The third time to the Savior," runs the proverb;[8] and my third journey at least confirmed its truth, for by good luck I again came off safely; and next to God I thank Dionysius for it, because there were many determined to destroy me, but he prevented them and showed a certain respect for me and my position.
b When I arrived, I thought my first task was to prove whether Dionysius was really on fire with philosophy, or whether the many reports that came to Athens were without foundation. Now there is a certain way of putting this to the test, a dignified way and quite appropriate to tyrants, especially to those whose heads are full of half-understood doctrines, which I saw at once upon my arrival was particularly the case with Dionysius. You must picture to such men the extent of the undertaking, describing what
c sort of inquiry it is, with how many difficulties it is beset, and how much labor it involves. For anyone who hears this, who is a true lover of wisdom, with the divine quality that makes him akin to it and worthy of pursuing it, thinks that he has heard of a marvelous quest that he must at once enter upon with all earnestness, or life is not worth living; and from that time forth he pushes himself and urges on his leader without ceasing, until he has reached the end of the journey or has become capable of doing without
d a guide and finding the way himself. This is the state of mind in which such a man lives; whatever his occupation may be, above everything and always he holds fast to philosophy and to the daily discipline that best makes him apt at learning and remembering, and capable of reasoning soberly with himself; while for the opposite way of living he has a persistent hatred. Those who are really not philosophers but have only a coating of opinions, like men whose bodies are tanned by the sun, when they see how much learning is required, and how great the labor, and how orderly
e their daily lives must be to suit the subject they are pursuing, conclude that the task is too difficult for their powers; and rightly so, for they are
341 not equipped for this pursuit. But some of them persuade themselves that they have already sufficiently heard the whole of it and need make no further effort. Now this is a clear and infallible test to apply to those who love ease and are incapable of strenuous labor, for none of them can ever

8. See 334d above.

blame his teacher, but only himself, if he is unable to put forth the efforts that the task demands.

It was in this fashion that I then spoke to Dionysius. I did not explain everything to him, nor did he ask me to, for he claimed to have already a sufficient knowledge of many, and the most important, points because b
of what he had heard others say about them. Later, I hear, he wrote a book on the matters we talked about, putting it forward as his own teaching, not what he had learned from me. Whether this is true I do not know. I know that certain others also have written on these same matters; but who they are they themselves do not know. So much at least I can affirm with confidence about any who have written or propose to write on these c
questions, pretending to a knowledge of the problems with which I am concerned, whether they claim to have learned from me or from others or to have made their discoveries for themselves: it is impossible, in my opinion, that they can have learned anything at all about the subject. There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straighway nourishes itself. And d
this too I know: if these matters are to be expounded at all in books or lectures, they would best come from me. Certainly I am harmed not least of all if they are misrepresented. If I thought they could be put into written words adequate for the multitude, what nobler work could I do in my life than to compose something of such great benefit to mankind and bring to light the nature of things for all to see? But I do not think that the e
"examination," as it is called, of these questions would be of any benefit to men, except to a few, i.e., to those who could with a little guidance discover the truth by themselves. Of the rest, some would be filled with an ill-founded and quite unbecoming disdain, and some with an exaggerated and foolish elation, as if they had learned something grand.

Let me go into these matters at somewhat greater length, for perhaps 342
what I am saying will become clearer when I have done so. There is a true doctrine that confutes anyone who has presumed to write anything whatever on such subjects, a doctrine that I have often before expounded, but it seems that it must now be said again. For every real being, there are three things that are necessary if knowledge of it is to be acquired: first, the name; second, the definition; third, the image; knowledge comes b
fourth, and in the fifth place we must put the object itself, the knowable and truly real being. To understand what this means, take a particular example, and think of all other objects as analogous to it. There is something called a circle, and its name is this very word we have just used. Second, there is its definition, composed of nouns and verbs. "The figure whose extremities are everywhere equally distant from its center" is the definition of precisely that to which the names "round," "circumference," and "circle" apply. Third is what we draw or rub out, what is turned or destroyed; c

but the circle itself to which they all refer remains unaffected, because it is different from them. In the fourth place are knowledge (*epistēmē*), reason (*nous*), and right opinion (which are in our minds, not in words or bodily shapes, and therefore must be taken together as something distinct both from the circle itself and from the three things previously mentioned); of
d these, reason is nearest the fifth in kinship and likeness, while the others are further away. The same thing is true of straight-lined as well as of circular figures; of color; of the good, the beautiful, the just; of body in general, whether artificial or natural; of fire, water, and all the elements; of all living beings and qualities of souls; of all actions and affections. For
e in each case, whoever does not somehow grasp the four things mentioned will never fully attain knowledge of the fifth.

These things, moreover, because of the weakness of language, are just as much concerned with making clear the particular property of each object
343 as the being of it. On this account no sensible man will venture to express his deepest thoughts in words, especially in a form which is unchangeable, as is true of written outlines. Let us go back and study again the illustration just given. Every circle that we make or draw in common life is full of characteristics that contradict the "fifth," for it everywhere touches a straight line, while the circle itself, we say, has in it not the slightest element belonging to a contrary nature. And we say that their names are by no
b means fixed; there is no reason why what we call "circles" might not be called "straight lines," and the straight lines "circles," and their natures will be none the less fixed despite this exchange of names. Indeed the same thing is true of the definition: since it is a combination of nouns and verbs, there is nothing surely fixed about it. Much more might be said to show that each of these four instruments is unclear, but the most important point is what I said earlier: that of the two objects of search—the particular
c quality and the being of an object—the soul seeks to know not the quality but the essence, whereas each of these four instruments presents to the soul, in discourse and in examples, what she is not seeking, and thus makes it easy to refute by sense perception anything that may be said or pointed out, and fills everyone, so to speak, with perplexity and confusion. Now in those matters in which, because of our defective training, we are not accustomed to look for truth but are satisfied with the first image suggested to us, we can ask and answer without making ourselves ridicu-
d lous to one another, being proficient in manipulating and testing these four instruments. But when it is "the fifth" about which we are compelled to answer questions or to make explanations, then anyone who wishes to refute has the advantage, and can make the propounder of a doctrine, whether in writing or speaking or in answering questions, seem to most of his listeners completely ignorant of the matter on which he is trying to speak or write. Those who are listening sometimes do not realize that it is not the mind of the speaker or writer which is being refuted, but these four instruments mentioned, each of which is by nature defective.

By the repeated use of all these instruments, ascending and descending e
to each in turn, it is barely possible for knowledge to be engendered of
an object naturally good, in a man naturally good; but if his nature is
defective, as is that of most men, for the acquisition of knowledge and the
so-called virtues, and if the qualities he has have been corrupted, then not 344
even Lynceus could make such a man see.[9] In short, neither quickness of
learning nor a good memory can make a man see when his nature is not
akin to the object, for this knowledge never takes root in an alien nature;
so that no man who is not naturally inclined and akin to justice and all
other forms of excellence, even though he may be quick at learning and
remembering this and that and other things, nor any man who, though
akin to justice, is slow at learning and forgetful, will ever attain the truth
that is attainable about virtue. Nor about vice, either, for these must be b
learned together, just as the truth and error about any part of being must
be learned together, through long and earnest labor, as I said at the begin-
ning. Only when all of these things—names, definitions, and visual and
other perceptions—have been rubbed against one another and tested, pupil
and teacher asking and answering questions in good will and without
envy—only then, when reason and knowledge are at the very extremity
of human effort, can they illuminate the nature of any object.[10]

For this reason anyone who is seriously studying high matters will be c
the last to write about them and thus expose his thought to the envy and
criticism of men. What I have said comes, in short, to this: whenever we
see a book, whether the laws of a legislator or a composition on any other
subject, we can be sure that if the author is really serious, this book does
not contain his best thoughts; they are stored away with the fairest of his
possessions. And if he has committed these serious thoughts to writing,
it is because men, not the gods, "have taken his wits away."[11] d

To anyone who has followed this discourse and digression it will be
clear that if Dionysius or anyone else—whether more or less able than
he—has written concerning the first and highest principles of nature, he
has not properly heard or understood anything of what he has written
about; otherwise he would have respected these principles as I do, and
would not have dared to give them this discordant and unseemly publicity.
Nor can he have written them down for the sake of remembrance; for
there is no danger of their being forgotten if the soul has once grasped e
them, since they are contained in the briefest of formulas. If he wrote them,
it was from unworthy ambition, either to have them regarded as his own
ideas, or to show that he had participated in an education of which he
was unworthy if he loved only the reputation that would come from having 345

9. Lynceus, one of the Argonauts, was proverbial for his keenness of vision.

10. Accepting the emendation *sunteinontōn* at b7.

11. *Iliad* vii.360.

shared in it. Now if Dionysius did indeed come to understand these matters from our single conversation, how that happened, "God wot," as the Thebans say. For as I said, I went through the matter with him once only, never afterwards. Whoever cares to understand the course of subsequent events should consider why it was that we did not go over the matter a second or a third time, or even oftener. Was it that Dionysius, after this
b one hearing, thought he understood well enough and really did understand, either because he had already found these principles himself or had previously learned them from others? Or did he think that what I said was of no value? Or, a third possibility, did he realize that this teaching was beyond him, and that truly he would not be able to live in constant pursuit of virtue and wisdom? If he thought my teachings of no value he contradicts many witnesses who say the opposite and who are probably much more capable judges of such matters than Dionysius. And if he had already discovered or learned these doctrines and regarded them as fitted
c for educating a liberal mind, how—unless he is a very strange creature indeed—could he have so lightly brought ignominy upon their teacher and guardian? But this is what he did, as I shall now tell you.

Shortly after the above occurrence, although Dionysius had previously allowed Dion to retain possession of his property and to enjoy its revenues, he gave orders to Dion's stewards not to send anything more to the Peloponnesus, as if he had completely forgotten his letter, saying that this property belonged not to Dion but to Dion's son, who was his nephew
d and under his legal guardianship. Matters then had come to this, in so short a time. From this action I saw precisely the character of Dionysius' desire for philosophy, and in spite of myself I was indignant, and with good reason. It was summer at the time, and ships were leaving the port. Though it was clear to me that I ought not to be more angry with Dionysius than with myself and the others who had compelled me to come a third
e time to this strait of Scylla, "To measure again the length of deadly Charybdis,"[12] yet I thought I ought to tell Dionysius that it was impossible for me to remain after this scurvy treatment of Dion. He tried to placate me and begged me to remain, thinking it would not go well with him if I should set out immediately as the personal bearer of this news; but when he could not persuade me, he said that he would himself make the
346 preparations for my departure. For in my anger I thought of going on board one of the vessels ready to set sail and suffering the consequences, whatever they might be, of being detained, since it was clearly evident that I had done no wrong but was the victim of wrongdoing. Seeing that nothing could induce me to remain, he devised a scheme for keeping me until the ships could no longer leave port. The following day he came to me with this persuasive speech: "Let us dispose of this matter of Dion
b and Dion's property which has been the cause of frequent disagreement between you and me. For your sake I will do this for Dion. Let him have

12. *Odyssey* xii.428.

his property and live in the Peloponnesus, not as an exile, but as one permitted to return here as soon as he and I and you his friends have come to an understanding—all this upon condition that he is not to conspire against me; you and your relatives and the relatives of Dion here shall be sureties to me, and he shall give you pledges of good faith. Let the property he takes be deposited in the Peloponnesus and at Athens in the keeping of any persons you please, and let Dion enjoy the revenues from it, but c
be without power to dispose of the principal without your consent. For it will be a large sum and I have little faith that if he had this wealth at his disposal he would act justly towards me; but in you and your friends I have more confidence. See now whether these proposals please you, and if they do, stay for the year on these terms and when spring comes depart d
with this property. Dion, I know, will be very grateful to you if you do this for him."

I was angered when I heard this proposal, nevertheless I said I would consider the matter and bring him my opinion on it the following day. This then was agreed upon. Later, when I had got to my own quarters and was thinking the matter over, I found myself in great perplexity; but this was the dominant thought in my deliberations: "Beware! Dionysius e
may not intend to keep a single one of his promises; but what if he should write to Dion after I have gone, telling him what he has just said to me? And should persuade a number of Dion's friends to write also, intimating plausibly that it was not his refusal but mine that prevented his doing what he promised, and making me out altogether indifferent to Dion's interests? Besides this, if he does not want to see me go and, without issuing definite orders to any ship's captain, should let it be generally 347
known, as he easily could, that he was unwilling for me to sail, would any captain take me as a passenger, even if I could get out of the palace of Dionysius?" For besides the other disadvantages of my situation, I was living in the garden surrounding the palace, and the gatekeeper would not have let me out without an express command from Dionysius. "But if I remain for the year, I can write to Dion what my situation is and what I am doing; and then if Dionysius keeps any part of his promises, what I have done will not seem altogether ridiculous," for the property of Dion, b
if estimated rightly, was probably worth not less than a hundred talents. "On the other hand, if the contrary comes to pass,[13] as is most likely, I don't see what course I can then take. Nevertheless, it seems that I must probably hold out one more year and put these schemes of Dionysius to the test of events."

Having come to this decision, I told Dionysius the next day that I had decided to remain. "But," I said, "you must not think that I can bind Dion. c
Let us send him a joint letter explaining the agreement we have just made and ask whether its terms satisfy him, telling him that if he is not satisfied and wishes to modify them in any way to write us at once; and in the

13. Reading *apemphainonta* in b3.

meantime I ask that you take no new steps affecting him." These were my words and these were the terms we agreed upon, almost exactly as I have stated them. Now the boats had set sail and it was no longer possible for
d me to leave, when Dionysius mentioned to me that half the property should be Dion's and half his son's. He said he was going to sell it and give me half the proceeds to take to Dion; the other half he would keep here for the son, for this was clearly the most equitable procedure. I was stunned by this statement, but thought it foolish to make any further protest; yet I did say that we should await the letter from Dion and advise him of these new conditions. Immediately thereafter he sold the whole of Dion's
e property in the most audacious manner, selling it on whatever terms and to whomever he pleased, and said not a word to me about it. And likewise I refrained from saying anything more to him about Dion's affairs, for I thought any further effort would be useless.

This then was the result of my efforts in aid of philosophy and my friends. From this time on Dionysius and I lived, I like a bird looking out
348 of its cage and longing to fly away, he scheming how to frighten me[14] without turning over any of Dion's property; yet before all Sicily we professed to be friends.

Now Dionysius, contrary to the practice of his father, tried to reduce the pay of his older mercenaries. The soldiers, infuriated, gathered in a
b mob and declared they would not permit it. He tried to hold out against them by closing the gates of the citadel, but they straightway moved against the walls, chanting a barbarian war cry; and this so frightened Dionysius that he yielded and granted even more than they demanded to the peltasts assembled there. Now a rumor quickly got about that Heraclides had been the cause of all this disturbance. Upon hearing it, Heraclides took flight and concealed himself; and Dionysius, being at a loss how to apprehend
c him, summoned Theodotes to the palace garden, where I happened to be walking at the time. I do not know what else they talked about, for I could not hear them; but I know and recall what Theodotes said to Dionysius in my presence. "Plato," he said, "I am trying to persuade Dionysius here that if I can bring Heraclides before us to answer the charges that have just been made against him, and if in consequence it seems necessary for him to leave Sicily, to let[15] him take his wife and child and sail to the
d Peloponnesus and live there, enjoying the revenue from his property so long as he does no harm to Dionysius. I have already summoned him and will do so now again, and one or the other of these messages should bring him. And I ask and beseech Dionysius, if he should happen upon Heraclides anywhere, either here or in the country, to do nothing more
e than banish him from the land during his present displeasure. Do you consent to this?" he asked, turning to Dionysius. "I consent," he said;

14. See *Letter* III, 318b.

15. Reading *axioun* in c9.

"even if he should be found in your own house he will suffer nothing beyond what you have said." The evening of the following day Eurybius and Theodotes came to me in haste, greatly troubled. Theodotes spoke for them. "Plato," he said, "you were a witness yesterday to the promise Dionysius made to you and me about Heraclides?" "Indeed I was," I replied. "But now," he continued, "there are peltasts running all about trying to take Heraclides, and it is likely that he is somewhere near here. You must with all speed go with us to Dionysius," he said. So we set out, 349
and when we came into his presence the two men stood weeping silently, and I said: "They are afraid that you have changed your mind regarding Heraclides and are acting contrary to what was agreed upon yesterday. For it appears that he has taken refuge nearby." At this he became angry and turned various colors, as is the way with an angry man. Falling before him, Theodotes seized his hand and implored him, with tears in his eyes, b
not to do such a thing. "Cheer up, Theodotes," I interrupted, trying to encourage him; "Dionysius will not presume to do anything contrary to the promise he made yesterday." And Dionysius looked at me and, like a true tyrant, "To you," he said, "I made no promise whatever." "By the gods," I replied, "you at least made a promise, not to do what Theodotes is now imploring you not to do." With these words I turned and went out. After this Dionysius continued to hunt for Heraclides, while Theodotes sent messengers warning him to flee; and though Tisias and a band of c
peltasts were sent in pursuit, Heraclides, it was reported, having a few hours the start of them, got safely into Carthaginian territory.

After this, Dionysius conceived that my resistance to his long-standing plot not to restore Dion's money could now be plausibly made the ground for enmity toward me. His first step was to send me out of the citadel on the pretext that the women were to hold a ten-day sacrifice in the garden d
where I dwelt, and directed me to live outside during this period at the home of Archedemus. While I was there Theodotes sent for me and poured out his complaints and his anger against Dionysius for what he had done. When Dionysius heard that I had visited Theodotes he used this as another pretext, similar to the earlier one, for quarreling with me. He sent to inquire e
whether I had in fact visited Theodotes at his invitation. "Certainly," I replied. "Then he bade me say," said the messenger, "that you are not doing right in always preferring Dion and Dion's friends to himself." After this message he never again summoned me back to the palace, it being now clear that I was the friend of Heraclides and Theodotes, and consequently his enemy, and he knew also that I was not pleased at the complete dissipation of Dion's goods. From that time on, then, I lived outside the 350
acropolis among the mercenaries. Some of the rowers in the fleet were from Athens and fellow citizens of mine; they and others came to me with the report that I had an evil name among the peltasts and that some of them were threatening to kill me if they ever got hold of me. I began then to plan the following means of escape. I sent letters to Archytas and my other friends in Tarentum telling them of my plight, and they found some

pretext for an embassy from their city, dispatching Lamiscus, one of their
b number, with a thirty-oared vessel. When he arrived he besought Dionysius on my behalf, saying that I wished to depart and begging him not to prevent it. Dionysius complied and released me, giving me travel money; but for Dion's property I made no further demand, nor did anyone deliver it to me.

Upon my return to the Peloponnesus I encountered Dion among the spectators at Olympia and recounted to him what had occurred. Calling upon Zeus to witness, he straightway summoned me and my relatives
c and friends to prepare for vengeance against Dionysius, demanding satisfaction to me for breach of hospitality (these were his words and this is what he thought), and to himself for his unjust dismissal and exile. When I heard this I told him to call upon my friends, if they wished to help him. "But as for me," I said, "you and the others compelled me, in a way, to become a guest at the table and hearth of Dionysius and a participant in his sacrifices; and he perhaps believed, from the many reports circulated against me, that I was plotting with you against him and the tyranny—
d yet he did not put me to death, but respected my person. Nor am I any longer at the age for helping anyone carry on war, though I am with you if ever you desire one another's friendship and wish to accomplish something good. But as long as you are intent on harm, look elsewhere for your allies." I said this in disgust at my Sicilian "adventure" and its lack of success. But they did not listen to me; and in failing to heed my attempts at reconciliation they are themselves responsible for all the misfortunes that have come upon them. None of them would ever have
e occurred, humanly speaking, if Dionysius had restored his property to Dion or become fully reconciled with him, for I would have been willing and easily able to restrain Dion; but as it is they have attacked one another and brought about universal disaster.

351 Dion's purpose, however, with respect to his native city and to the power he sought for himself and his friends, was exactly what I should say any moderate man, myself or anyone else, ought to have; such a man would think of enjoying great power and honor only because he is conferring great benefits. I do not mean such benefits as are conferred by an impecunious agitator, lacking in self-control, the weak victim of his passions, who enriches himself and his partisans and his city by organizing plots and
b conspiracies, and puts to death the men of wealth on the pretext that they are enemies, and distributes their property, and charges his fellow conspirators and followers not to blame him if they are poor; nor do I mean the honors enjoyed by a man who "benefits" his city in this way, by dividing the goods of the few among the many by public decree, or who, as head of a great city ruling over many lesser ones, unjustly assigns
c the wealth of the smaller ones to his own city. Neither Dion nor anyone else in his right mind would seek power for these ends, power that would be a plague to himself and his family for all time; but rather would seek it for the purpose of creating, without murder or bloodshed, the best and

most just constitution and system of laws. This is what Dion was aiming at, preferring to be the victim of wickedness rather than the agent of it, though he endeavored to protect himself. In spite of all this he fell, just as he had come to the summit of triumph over his enemies. There is nothing surprising in what he experienced. For although a good man who d
is also prudent and sagacious cannot be altogether deceived about the character of wicked men, it would not be surprising if he should suffer the misfortune of the skilled captain who, though not unaware of the approach of a storm, may not foresee its extraordinary and unexpected violence, and be swamped by its force. This is the mistake that Dion made. Those who caused him to fall were men whom he well knew to be villains, but he did not suspect the depths of their ignorance and villainy and greed. e
By this error he is fallen, and Sicily is overwhelmed with grief.

The advice I have to offer you in the present state of affairs has mostly 352
been given, and let that suffice. Why I undertook the second voyage to Sicily I thought I ought to explain, because of the strange and improbable nature of these events. If then they appear more plausible as I have described them, and if it has been made evident that there were sufficient motives for what happened, this account will have properly accomplished its purpose.